

RESISTING INTERNAL COLONIALISM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF MARIA CAMPBELL'S HALFBREED

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ABSTRACT

Internal colonialism means that the oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized are within the same system. Race, gender and class are used as a mechanism to keep people in the subordinate position. Race performs a major role in this procedure. The dominant employs it to stereotype the identities of subordinate. It is also used prevent any positive change in the colonizer's history. Residential schools, foster care homes and welfare funding were such powerful tools at the hands of dominant that it ultimately managed to reduce subjugated on the fringes of suppression and marginality.

KEYWORDS: Internal Colonialism, Campbell Maria. Halfbreed, Colonial Concept

INTRODUCTION

Colonialism worked in its most heinous way by inflicting all types of violence in the lives of marginalized colonizers irrespective of age and gender. The system in its aim to erase an entire community to retain its own superiority worked so meticulously that the internalized hatred forced people to commit suicides. Many lives were ended this way and noting fruitful was done to alter the situation. The word 'internal colonialism' was first used by Leo Marquard in his book *South Africa's Colonial Policy* written in 1957. But the word gained popularity when Pablo Gonzalez Casanova used the term again in his article "Internal Colonialism and National Development" published in 1965, in which he says,

"With the disappearance of the direct domination of the foreigners over natives, the notion of the domination and exploitation of the natives by the natives emerged."

And this new phenomenon of domination was called internal colonialism by him where the minority class is made to believe that their culture and values are inferior to their White dominating superiors. It also means that subordinate group depends economically, politically and socially on their superiors. The consequences of this exploitative marginalization can be seen in unequal and biased nature of policies and practices including social, public and educational institutions etc. Internal colonialism is the main tool to examine and to understand the problems related to racism, resistance, identity and cultural space. Liberation, awakening, assertion or the resistance to oppression whatever word we use it ultimately points towards the struggle to embrace one's own identity while negating the suppression, isolation, marginalization, policies of assimilation and the other forms of discrimination. Fanon has said that,

"Decolonization is always a violent event...it starts from the very first day with the basic claims of the colonized."(1)

The efforts of the Métis are directed to decolonize the internal colonization that has been ruining them meticulously. The recognition of this oppression has led Métis towards resistance and the quest of identity. What is

important is here is the fact that the writer chosen for this study unlike Fanon offers a new way and hope of decolonization. As she has understood that their 'violent event' will end up colonizing others and the vicious circle of oppression, struggle and revolution will never cease to exist. She is resisting the dominant in search of an identity where they will gain their rights, freedom and happiness without being oppressors. The desire and the claim of this identity have brought forth the social fabric of the lives of Métis in Canada and the intricacies of their existence.

It is pertinent to see that the social subjugation, economic instability, lack of political leadership and the stereotypes are the layers which has covered the lives the lives of these people with such intensity that they can't see themselves united. They are divided again and again by these factors. Another reason of being in the inferior position is that these same aspects are reinforced by the governments to justify their lack of action and fortification to help Métis. There is a clear indication in this story towards the fact the poverty is the ultimate cause of their problem, it gives impetus to displacement, powerlessness and internalization of inferiority. It increases prostitution and made people more vulnerable to violence hence pushed the already marginalized community towards more peripheries. These social situations have not only affected the social and personal lives of Métis people, its negative effects can be seen the health of people too.

Métis in Canada have been constantly living under the shadows of colonialism and capital exploitation. Even the assimilation policies made by the system have not reduced their social, economic, linguistic, cultures and spiritual servility. Métis are fighting for the right of self-government, land claims and are potentially resisting the hegemonic ideas yet they have actually internalized dominant ideas and norms to such an extent that they fail to understand the state of coercion. The oppression of Métis coupled with poverty, dependency, institutional and structural racism has become a grave problem.

Maria Campbell is one of the best-known Métis writers who have not only raised her voice against discrimination faced by Métis but also contributed to preserve the identity of Métis people. Campbell's *Halfbreed* is considered an imperative literary document to understand Métis and their position in Canada. Besides it is also significant that nowadays half-breed is not used to describe Métis anymore. Métis, officially, has become a recognized aboriginal community but Maria has used the word Half-breed to bring forth the real and discriminatory face of a developed and multi-cultured nation. Campbell wrote *Halfbreed* in 1973 in which she has tried to explain the life of an ordinary Métis woman. Campbell tells that racial discrimination has become a part of her daily routine. Flaerova points out that

"Racism is undeniably the underlying ideology of the manifest policies regarding Native-White relations throughout the history of Canada. Racist myths, biased historical facts and humiliation of the native cultures and traditions served as powerful means by which the colonization of the Métis was accomplished. The Catholic Church and the educational system were the most powerful instruments employed for the implementation of the colonial ideology into the Métis' consciousness (2)

Métis are discriminated because of their Métis or half-breed heritage. In the beginning of the book Campbell makes the purpose of writing very clear. In the last paragraph of the introduction she says:

"I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustration and the dreams.... I am not bitter. I have passed that stage. I only want to say: this is what it was like, this is what it is still like." (43)

Campbell shows how since childhood Métis kids learn to accept the discriminatory behavior from their elders. The accepted biased mode of their lives leads to their ultimate subjugation. They never hold their heads high never fight

back or answer back. They like to walk silently from the streets of White people. All these things affect young kids' thoughts and perceptions about themselves and their people. While recalling her own childhood she writes,

"I never saw my father talk back to a White man unless he was drunk. I never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people." (45)

This attitude of adults not only taught the children to accept their position unquestionably but has also led them to find escape and freedom in liquor. Regarding the colonial strategy employed by the British government in Canada, Adams observes:

"The segregation of Aboriginal peoples from White mainstream society was a deliberate strategy employed by the state. This separation tended to reinforce stereotypical images of indigenous peoples who were cast aside as being dirty, lazy, vulgar, and unsuitable to live amongst so-called civilized and clean white society. These images become internalized and Native peoples developed a shame and inferiority complex about their culture. As a result we function within this colonized framework of culture and this legitimize the stereotyping of our culture and personality" (as qtd in Flaerova pp-2)

The attitude of tutors also pushes Métis kids towards a sense of being marginalized. Maria's school experiences are very negative. She feels very much insulted when her teacher associates Métis to give an example of those who are "poor in spirit." Maria stood up to voice against it. At this moment the teacher not only called her aggressive and violent but also punished her. Thus once again the stereotype image is being used to keep subordinate class under control and to dehumanize them. Paulo Frier in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* says

"Dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is *not* a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed" (12)

Adams claims that "insecurity and fear [...] form[ed] the basis of schooling" in colonialism (As qtd in Flaerova pp-158). Such racist attitude forces aboriginal kids to accept all white ideas of supremacy which completely wipes out their self esteem. It cements the inferiority to such an extent in their hearts that their subjugation seems justified to them. It is this acceptance that forces Campbell to internalize shame of being a Métis that she starts rejecting everything which reminds her of being a Métis. Coming back from school, she behaves in a very aggressive manner. She recalls,

"coming home and saying ugly things to Mom. She took me in her arms and tried to hold me. but I kicked her and said that I hated her, Daddy and' all of you no-good half-breeds."

This behavior of Campbell can be seen as a mean which helps to strengthen the White class. The internalized domination of the oppressor compels the oppressed to internalize self hatred. The internalization of inferiority by the oppressor helps the dominant to block the path of their liberation. And the dictatorial attitude of an educational institute is a powerful tool to exclude and marginalize an entire race from its own land. Racism is a significant factor leading to the oppression of Métis as they are made to believe that they themselves are responsible for their condition and any positive change is impossible for them. Indeed the social problems that they are facing can directly be related to racism as it encourages the dominant class to exploit them economically, socially, psychologically, spiritually and emotionally. According to Sarah Carter the policy of inculcating racial inferiority is very strong tool to,

"Create and sustain concepts of racial and cultural differences, to legitimize tough action against indigenous

people, and to convey the messages of the necessity of policing boundaries between different people.”

Schools has been used a mechanism to uproot Métis kids from their cultures and families. It has worked intrinsically with the oppressive system to reduce Métis to the status of nothing. Students were not allowed to read or assert themselves; in fact they were dehumanized by the oppressive system. The residential school system was another traumatic experience in Campbell’s life. It was an apparatus to impose subjugation on the Métis kids. But the shrewd policies of the colonial system made people believe that it will provide a better future to their kids. Campbell’s grannie Dubuque and her mother strongly believed that it can help their kids to get integrated in the majority section of the society. Campbell’s experiences make it clear that the sole purpose of such schools was to subjugate the entire aboriginal community. The students were not even allowed to talk in their own language. Campbell remembers such incidents noticeably and explains them.

Campbell, in her childhood, internalizes this belief that what she wants is available on the other side of being a Métis. So to get her desired life she started rejecting her Métis identity altogether. Maria’s mother, on the other hand, believes that there is something supernatural about their position. She believes in fate and designs of God. This godly revelation helps the oppressor to keep the oppressed under control. This directs oppressed class in falling short to identify that they are implicated in societal relations of repression and subjugation. So operating within this colonial set up which Benedict Anderson calls has a “(confusedly) classifying mind” (165) which focuses more on the identities imposed by the colonizer rather on the ethnicity which people themselves experience.

It is significant to note that all Métis are victims of brutality, racism and hatred but even here the gender plays a vital role. To say it more clearly the Métis women are not only victims of such discrimination but are also easy targets of sexual violence by the White. Maria like all Métis kids used to accompany her family on picnics. These picnics were often spoiled by the Whites. Maria narrates one of the incidents where she witnesses how the white men used to take away their women.

“The men would get happy drunk at first and as the evening progressed white men would come by. They all danced and sang together, and then all too soon one of the white men would bother the women. Our men would become angry, but instead of fighting the white men they beat their wives...Meanwhile the white men stood together in a group, laughing and drinking, sometimes dragging a woman away. How I hated them!” (38)

So the bodies of women are used as a site of exercising power as well as a site to humiliate or to challenge the Métis male community. Even in Métis families the male holds the higher position than his female counterparts. So by dishonoring the body of a woman the colonial society robs the power of their men too. This barbaric act acts as an instrument to push Métis men towards disempowerment. In their attempt to find an escape from such shame the men drown themselves in the sea of liquor, drugs and suicide. Duran and Duran, while explaining this condition of oppressed class clarifies that the process of facing racial hatred and to internalize self contempt and dejection forced aboriginals either to commit suicide or to kill themselves with alcohol and drugs.

Duran and Duran further adds that if the inferior race voices its anger and rejects its powerlessness they are labeled as violent and aggressive from which society needs to be protected. The dominant class succeeds in showing the genuineness of their powerful position which does the utmost harm to the marginalized inferior section. This paves the way for the inferior race to be silent as their voices are never heard their cries for justice never answered.

Campbell couldn't manage to complete her study and keep her family together. She again tried to find an escape from her Métisness and to do so she rejects the man whom she was in love and marries a white man named Darrel. Her marriage, on one hand, was an effort to keep her family together as she believed her White husband can provide everything to her brothers and sisters. If we delve deeply then it becomes apparent that it was a conscious act to get acceptance by the White society. This decision leads her towards acknowledging the assimilation policy which rejects everything if it is not according to White standards. After marriage she confronts the harsh reality of her dreams. She feels shattered and humiliated. Maria herself says,

"Life has played such a joke...I had married to escape from what I'd thought was an ugly world, only to find a worse one." (134)

Maria turns to Welfare Schemes of the dominant for a better life but ends up facing more humiliation and degradation. It is worthy to note that the government's initiatives to improve the condition of Métis through welfare schemes looks a generous act but when we dig little deep it becomes apparent that the aboriginals are not provided help to raise their life standards or to free themselves from the shackles of poverty and stereotypes but are given help to emphasize their laziness, brutishness, inability, illiteracy etc. The welfare schemes did not yield any good for Métis but has pushed them with more force into the abyss of penury, menial jobs or total unemployment and nothingness. They are enforced to depend on such assistance to meet their fundamental needs. If we take all these views into consideration then it is easy to understand that the racism is not only a social construction but is developing with official state support.

Racial discrimination has led Métis in Canada to practice resistance against it. The extended White dominance in all spheres of life and the discrimination has posed a great threat to the Métis culture and identity. It is a crucial fact that between the oppressed class' subordinate position and oppressor's dominant location exists a class which neither accepts to be subjugated nor to be assimilated, this class defies the authority hence shapes the rivulet of resistance. Resistance to internal colonialism has occurred through various ways in Canada, it includes the decolonization of colonial Métis minds, denial of stereotypes, dissent of assimilation policies and assertion of identity etc. Resistance to a system which is powerful, oppressive and legitimized is never easy. The legitimization of domination actually insinuates faith among the marginalized class as the dominant knows that the lack of faith can create a huge hazard to its position. The act of legitimating makes oppression justifiable as the oppressed class is made to believe that their condition is unalterable and the oppressor is not crushing them down rather it is extending a helping hand to them. The acceptance of this ideology led the Whites to the position of dominance while its recognition paved a way for Métis resistance. The subordinate class likes to take hold of power as it helps it to fight the discriminatory nature of welfare schemes and other policies. The resistance to system brings role of power into play. According to Foucault power is ever increasing and ubiquitous. He further adds,

"Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; or on the contrary, the destruction and the contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they effect." (as qtd in Nancy Hartsock)

Foucault's main point lies in adding that wherever there is power, there is resistance. Power has its existence in its usage. It exists in the various forms in the assorted social relations. But Foucault has also suggested that resistance bears no good fruits, if it achieves its goals it will only create a new oppressed class. Hence Foucault leaves no good scope for resistance. For him it means to grab power from others to dominant them. But as far the marginalized sections are

concerned resistance to dominant's power is the only way for them to challenge and destabilize the centre. But Maria Campbell offers a new way to end the oppression of human race.

J.C. Scott in his influential work *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Resistance* (1985) introduced the idea that resistance and oppression are not only inter-related but are in continual fluctuation. He pointed out that if only public resistance such as rebellion or historical episodes or great political upheavals are taken into account we actually miss the more subtle but potent forms of resistance of everyday actions. Scott has used one another notion 'transcripts' which includes both private and public realms of people. Transcripts, according to Scott, are behavior of people which fit them in particular situations and circumstances. He said that transcripts share a close connection with resistance. He has emphasized that resistance means challenging,

"Public transcripts' by making use of prescribed roles and language to resist the abuse of power – including things like 'rumour, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity.'" (137)

Scott further mentions that these techniques becomes useful for people who are kept under control and are threatened with violence by the dominant, as it helps them to adopt a,

'a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public transcript... in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted and veiled for safety's sake' (137).

These kinds of acts don't require a well organized system to voice their anger and resistance. It can be (is) used individually and collectively by the oppressed without directly brazing out and challenging the dominant.

The acts of 'everyday resistance' as defined by Scott are also visible in Maria's Halfbreed, which has helped her, her family and her community to protect and preserve its customs, traditions and values. Maria resists the labels of Métis as lazy, anomalous, poor, alcoholic and violent people and through her story she has tried to tell the dominant class that it has dispossessed them of their ways of living and has occupied their lands. Verna Heikkila in her article "Blankets of Shame" has rightly remarked that,

"...instead of accepting the half-breed identity imposed on her and "her people" by the colonial state, Maria Campbell takes it into her own hands to define Metisness as she experiences it... Halfbreed establishes Métisness as a socially acceptable ethnic cultural category, replacing a sense of nothingness, of being neither native nor white, of being only half-breed."

Maria's great grandmother Cheechum was great source of energy for her. Cheechum even refused to use bed or table as it reminded her of colonialism and she was not ready to sacrifice her own culture to adopt an oppressor's endowment. It's her teachings and faith in her own culture which helped Maria to accept her own Métis self. It is important to understand that Cheechum's resistance was not result of her shame, in fact it was a very conscious act on her part which helped her to uphold the identity which later on paved a new way for Maria. Cheechum was politically and socially aware person, she could see through the tricks of the Whites. She understood that the welfare schemes, residential schools, treaties and even the stereotypical images, all were used to serve the interests of the Whites. Maria narrates one such incident which reveals the awareness of Cheechum

"My Cheechum used to tell me that when the government gives you something, they take all that you in return- your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you a living soul... When I tried to explain to her that the teacher said

governments were made by the people, she told me, "It only looks like that from the outside, my girl." (159)

She didn't allow Maria's father to join army in the World War II. She disgusted the idea of war as for her,

"The war was white business, not ours, and was just between rich and greedy people who wanted power." (22)

With these words she not only resists war and dominant's ideas but also reinforces the idea that Métis are peace loving people. These ideas also influenced Maria's father. He like Cheechum never accepted anything from the dominant class which was 'donated' to them on the pretext of welfare or charity. He never allowed his kids to wear, eat or keep what was dropped at their door on Christmas by the Whites. He used to "pick up the box and burn it" (27). His this resistance saved Maria from facing humiliation in her school where on seeing other Métis kids wearing the clothes donated by the whites, the White kids used to laugh and feel proud of themselves. The attitude of these kids clearly shows the mentality of the dominant class which subjugated people in the name of offering help. They took away the receivers', in Cheechum's words 'pride and dignity.'

Maria has clearly rejected this developed world as it offers nothing to her. She is not ready to support it until it is ready to integrate Métis into its system with respect and pride. She highlights how the domination of Whites has destroyed her people. She says,

"Their [Métis] way of life was part of Canada's past and they saw no place in the world around them, for they believed they had nothing to offer. They felt shame, and with shame loss of pride and the strength to live each other day."

At the end, Maria had realized that the change was taking place, her people were coming to resist together the blanket of shame they were carrying. She hoped that one day, 'people will set aside their differences and come together as one.' She at the end completely resists the idea of an armed revolution as she feels that this way they will 'end up oppressing someone else.' And she is not ready to see her people as oppressors.

The writing undoubtedly portray the story of Métis struggle to reclaim their distinctive nationhood and their fight against the system to gain their legal aboriginal rights. The writer highlights how Métis are being externalized from the system and left to pursue a completely different quest for identity to gain empowerment. It is also brought forward that the history of Métis and Indians should be interrogated carefully as both the communities share a common history. The exclusion from mainstream and the forcible racialized identity should be challenged.

The racial discrimination, violence and oppression and the resistance to it has shaped a vital part of the lives of women and the Métis in general. She through their writings has resisted the dominant's representation of Métis culture, history and tradition. She has confronted the stereotypical images of her people and has shouldered the responsibility of bringing into lime light the truth of their existence. Writing itself has become very powerful tool in her hands to resist the internal colonialism of the oppressive White class and its internalization by the native which has eclipsed their lives. The resistance is a clarion call to probe deep in the system and to find clear answer for some question: how and why the representation has gone wrong? Why people are 'othered' in their own nation rather than being integrated? How and why the histories have managed to distort the histories of Métis? And above all when the violence, discrimination, and coercion are going to end? Maria Campbell has noticeably brought up the matter into consideration. Almost all people are struggling with the abuse of alcoholism and drugs as they find it an easy way to escape from the harsh realities of life. This addiction is enforced upon them by the system. As a result of this Métis people, especially women, are more susceptible to die of drug addiction, homicide and suicide.

It is crucial to understand that the writer has though resisted the oppressive structure but she has also made it clear that solution to this problem lies only in the mutual understanding and sharing the responsibility of change. Benedict Anderson in his timeless article has adhered that nations are imagined communities; they are socially constructed by those people or group of people who identify themselves with as an inextricable part of it. Now if we look closely then it is apparent that Métis as a marginalized community are not given the right of this identification, hence the writers or people at large are voicing their resistance in their writing to the 'imagined community' which has deaden them and colonized them internally. Their subjugation is so severe that they are not allowed to talk in their own language in schools, foster care homes or at work places. This linguistic displacement is also resisted. The writers are of the view that language is medium to enclose and enthrall the customs, traditions, norms and values of people. The control over the language has played a vital role in controlling the culture of people.

The control over the historical representation is also challenged and resisted. This control has controlled the lives of Métis people in public especially schools, universities and media representations. The (mis) representations have posed great threats to the Métis identity. Maria Campbell has discussed this problem in her book how the wrong facts were taught and ultimately inculcated in the memories of Natives as well as Whites to facilitate subjugation and domination. The writer has encouraged people to know, assert and reclaim their identities by exploring histories from different points. She has also advised to interrogate the power relations of social structure while challenging or looking at the histories. Sexual violence has been shown as the means to maintain control over bodies, especially female bodies. They are considered 'rapable', dirty and are often addressed as 'squaw'. This stereotyping has paved the way for the cultural colonization of the Métis in Canada.

It is right to quote here what A.G. Ruffo in his article "Why Native Literature" while talking about the need of native writings has mentioned that,

"....many Native writers see themselves in relation to their work, their people and Canadian society at large. Indeed it would not be hyperbole to say that the kind of writing to which these writers refer faces with an unblinking eye of realities of what it means to be a people under siege....indeed the situation at the end of 20th century for Native people is critical. For many it is a matter of life and death...the only alternative to this kind of colonizing imposition is for Native people to claim their own voice and thereby give insight into their own values, traditions, concerns and needs."

The graveness of the situation is clear. Métis feel neglected in their own country.

"For they see themselves as still colonized, always invaded, never free of a history of white occupation."
(Boehmer, as qtd in Ruffo)

CONCLUSIONS

The resistance voiced in this writing is actually a call for emancipation and survival. So it has become necessary to break free from the racism, sexism, violence, stereotype images which are imposed on the Métis by the Whites to make their subjugation possible. Writing is adopted as a mode to reject this cultural, spiritual, political and economic subjugation. It is this courage which had led Maria to embrace her Métis identity and to work for the liberation of her people. And the signification of this endeavor cannot be overstated.

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